

WOMEN IN ATHLETICS

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The modern trend in Physical Education, after many years of experience, is to give the child, adolescent, or young adult some mode of physical expression, commensurate with their physical capacity and build, and catering within reason to their natural desires. Whether it be dancing, fencing, games or other physical exercise, colleges, schools and universities encourage such means of expression and have teachers and coaches specially trained for this purpose.

We frequently hear unfavorable criticism of many branches of sport which can logically be attributed to biased prejudice. When this type of criticism aims at women athletes, especially those in field and track, stating that such competitive indulgence has an adverse influence on their health, tends to eliminate womanly qualities, (deportment mannerisms etc.) and makes them mannish, then we have to study the subject seriously. These accusations must be analysed and answered.

In my field of observation as Medical School Inspector I have had an opportunity to observe thousands of young girls develop into adolescence and young womanhood and have yet to find a case where the health of any girl was affected adversely by competitive sport.

Children with defects are automatically eliminated from intense physical exercise and competitive sport by the Medical Inspector.

No authority has, as yet, proven that a healthy girl could injure internal organs or impair their function if she is properly trained.

Defects such as, internal hernia, floating kidney or fungoid tumor etc., which are not obvious in the regular medical examination may cause trouble under sudden strain and stress. But these defects were there to begin with and were not caused but brought to light by the exercise.

With the present day type of University trained Physical Instructor, who has an understanding of Physiology, and a good knowledge of large muscle function and development there is no danger of intrusting the training of young women and girls for competitive sport in their care. The Physical Instructor who knows the importance of continuous training for athletic events, will not allow her charge to overstrain or overtrain, will recognize early signs of fatigue and will eliminate those that appear unfit for the events. With the co-operation of the doctor who examines and checks up on these girls at different times the possibility for any serious injury is very remote. There is more danger, in my opinion, in unrestricted skipping-rope games that most young girls indulge in without proper supervision.

When bad effects on health are mentioned, I particularly notice the contrary. Girls who under proper supervision indulge happily in competitive sports are the healthiest, the most resistant to disease, and have the least trouble with their natural functions.

Pertaining to the loss of womanly qualities and the tendency to making them mannish we must consider the following.

Anthropologists divide mankind roughly into three main types or groups: the Pyknic, Aesthetic and Athletic. The pyknic type is fat, short and stocky: the aesthetic, long, lean, and lax: and the athletic who is medium in size, and whose physical aspect was so well depicted by the Grecian sculptors. These types in turn may have many variations, one type merging into another, or one individual having characteristics of more than one type. The classification is somewhat arbitrary, but individuals can be typed and put into certain categories depending on which of his qualities are predominant.

However, the important factor of glandular influence can change the whole picture and make the athletic type appear lazy and the other types phenomena of stamina and endurance.

Because of our present day knowledge of glandular function it has become established that no male is completely masculine and no female completely feminine. Whichever sex glands have the greatest influence on the individual determines that appearance of the individual. The choice of physical expression depends primarily on the qualities possessed by the individual and is determined by their glands.

How often has it been observed that a promising young girl in her teens who runs a splendid race gradually drops out of competition because of secondary physical changes caused by her glands. Nature has taken its toll and instead of running she waddles. The intense preliminary training that this girl underwent did not impede nature's work.

But we have the other type of girl whose secondary physical changes are not so manifest or are only of a minor nature and this type of girl continues on to athletic fame. This type finds competitive sport her natural means of physical expression.

It is my contention that it is not the competitive sport that influences the type but that it is the type which chooses the sport.

Well known advocates of women in sport deride the idea that womanly qualities are lost in such competition and point out the beauty and grace of female tennis, golf, jumping and other sport champions as examples of the contrary.

In my humble opinion these grounds for objection to women in strenuous athletics are without foundation.

Competitive sports, especially outdoor sports have a salubrious effect from the physical, mental and moral viewpoints and if eliminated as advocated would leave these young women with no other proper means of physical expression desirable to them, and the object of physical education would be defeated.

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Some observations on this article are given on the next page.

Copies of Dr. Blumenfeld's article were sent to a number of ladies whose work brings them into close contact with large numbers of girls, and whose views were known to be divided on the subject. Their opinions follow. It would be foolish to pretend that nothing can be added to what appears here. The experiences of different readers lead to different conclusions. If you have a special thought on the subject, please send it in for the next issue. Ed.

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Dr. Blumenfeld is an optimist! He gives us an ideal picture, but unfortunately one which does not always exist in real life. The girl who is never injured, the perfect instructor (and medical examiner), the physical, mental and moral values always accruing to the participant!

The instructor is not always so wise. There are still too many men coaching girl athletes; the desires and reactions of the girl in athletic activities can best be understood by the young woman who is herself a lover of games. Medical examinations are not given to all girls who enter athletic competition. There is too much pressure on the potential athlete, from the coach, the school, the club, the reporter, who, in a greater or lesser degree, will benefit from the reflected glory of her record. The system is wrong which sends a "winner" from tournament to tournament, until playing becomes not a pleasure, but a grind and a responsibility.

We are human - not prejudiced. We all see only what we choose to see. One man may see a girl in competition losing the charm which he believes girls should have. Another man sees the beautiful and skilful performance and his admiration goes out to the girl because of this. Many women are anxious to safeguard the girl in all her activities so that she will have only the finest things possible to her in life.

I have no argument with Dr. Blumenfeld. I only wish that he would use his enthusiasm to improve the conditions of training and competition, which are not up to standard, so that all girls may gain pleasure and benefit from games and sports, in proportion to their ability and desire to participate.

Florence A. Somers,
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Dr. Blumenfeld's article is interesting and sound and is specially helpful just now when adverse criticism concerning women taking part in strenuous athletics and competitions is so prevalent.

Unfortunately though, Dr. Blumenfeld's article does not cover all the conditions under which young women are competing today. He does not mention the untrained coach in Physiology of Exercise and in Theory of Movement, who is so often in charge of clubs catering to those beyond school age. These coaches, frequently men, know nothing about the mechanism of the feminine physique and they often strain their pupils to the limit in order to produce "stars". If all women's clubs indulging in various activities were able to engage scientifically trained coaches, many of the abuses criticised at present would in my opinion cease.

Ontario

Miss Viola Harvey, formerly health director at the Edmonton Y.W.C.A., is spending the year in study at the University of Wisconsin.

Miss Elizabeth Wardley attended the summer course in physical education at the New York University Camp on Sebago Lake, New York.

A very well attended and delightful refresher course was conducted by Miss Helen Bryans of the Ontario College of Education in June, 1936, at the Y.M.C.A. Camp on Lake Couchiching. The visiting instructors were Miss Astrid Schnidt and Miss Anne Duggan who taught the Bjorksten Gymnastics and Tap Dancing, respectively.

From May 25th to May 30th the National Council, Y.W.C.A. held a Refresher Course for their own physical directors at the Toronto Y.W.C.A. This was a very largely attended by physical directors from all over Canada. Miss Mary Breen of the National Recreation Association, New York, gave a course in Recreation and Miss Erica Harms, a graduate of the Medau School, Germany, a course in German Gymnastics. Other instructors were Miss Florence Somers, Folk Dancing, and Miss Marion Hobday, the Modern Dance, both of the staff of The Margaret Eaton School, and Miss Mildred Wickson, Tap Dancing.

Mr. John Madsen, director of Madsen's Gymnastic Institute, Toronto, and Mrs. Madsen, conducted a tour to Denmark this summer where the regular six weeks' summer course at Niels Bukh's College in Ollerup was taken. Among those who made up the party were Miss Dorothisruth Meilicke of the Provincial Department of Recreation, British Columbia; Miss Ada Sparling, St. Mary's, Ontario; Miss Eva Tetlow of the Bolton Avenue School, Toronto; Mr. R. Baldwin, Upper Canada College; Mr. W.R.T. Donaldson, Parkdale Collegiate, Toronto, and Mrs. Donaldson. Mr. John Gray, who was also a member of the party, is remaining in Denmark to take the year's course.

The summer courses in physical education, conducted by the Ontario Department of Education at Kingston and Toronto, were held for the first time last summer at the Y.M.C.A. Camp, Geneva Park, Lake Couchiching. The two hundred and fifty men and women in attendance worked each day except Saturday and Sunday for five weeks, and found the change from city heat very acceptable. Miss Helen Bryans was the principal in charge of the women and Mr. Frank Halbus of the men, while Mr. Fred Bartlett was the Camp Supervisor.

Discovering England, Ireland and Germany on her own during the summer months, was the pleasant experience of Miss Dorothy Jackson of the staff of The Margaret Eaton School. Good fortune led her to the London office of Major Ney of the National Council of Education. With Major Ney's letter of introduction to Dr. Theodor Wilhelm of The Anglo-German Academic Bureau, first-hand knowledge was obtained of The New Education in Germany, and through the kindness of Dr. Wilhelm, a permit was secured from The Reich Minister of Education to visit schools in Berlin. Subsequently Miss Jackson was taken to the head office of the B.D.M. (Bund Deutsche Mädchen) by a German official, and had the pleasure of talking with Fraulein Ihm and Fraulein Wrench, two of the head women of this department. While in Berlin Miss Jackson attended The

Medau School, and later in England, the English Scandinavian Summer School.

Miss Louise Colley of the Y.W.C.A. staff, Montreal; Miss Flora Morrison of the staff of Edgehill School for Girls, Windsor, Nova Scotia; Miss J. L. Boyes, Hamilton; Miss M. Chase, Aylmer, Ontario; Miss J. Ramsden, Lambeth, Ontario; Miss F. G. Dale, St. Mary's, Ontario; and Miss E. H. Day, Saint John, New Brunswick, were other Canadians attending the English Scandinavian School in Surrey last summer.

Plans for the fifth annual Christmas Holiday Refresher Course, sponsored by the Alumnae of The Margaret Eaton School, are under way. The course is held in Toronto and those interested in obtaining further information are asked to get in touch with the secretary, Miss Elva Miller, 604 Avenue Road, Toronto.

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Quebec

On Friday and Saturday, Nov. 27th & 28th, the Alumnae of the McGill School of Physical Education presented "RHYTHM AROUND THE WORLD" at McGill University in aid of the Sir Arthur Currie Memorial Gymnasium Fund.

Three large audiences thoroughly enjoyed a long and varied programme of Mimetics, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Athletic Poses, Scenes from Camp Life, Tableaux and Dances from many lands.

The first of the four parts into which the programme was divided depicted the British Isles. This was followed in turn by Europe, the Orient and lastly the New World. Many of the dances were designed for the occasion. Altogether the performance was very delightful, reflecting a tremendous amount of work by a large and enthusiastic group. The lighting effects and stage settings were worthy of the Ballet and the dressés both beautiful and authentic.

So many graduates did noble work that it is quite impossible to acknowledge their individual contributions. However special mention is due to Mrs. J. Forman the Convener and Mrs. F. Binnore the President of the Alumnae Association. The lead given by these two ladies was backed up by no less than 95 per cent of graduates resident in Montreal. Of these 60 per cent were actual performers. Every class since the school opened was represented and to their credit let it be noted that quite a few of these laid aside maternal duties to lend their aid.

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